



Mentoring Program Enhances Safety

Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania

RMP Network is designed to share successful practices in RMP implementation, risk communication, and use of the data. The projects detailed in RMP Network are easily reproducible, low cost and promote partnership-building in the community. This factsheet does not provide extensive information about a project. Rather, it is intended to help stakeholders generate ideas, identify tools and pinpoint funding sources for accident preparedness and prevention initiatives.

Purpose

The Lehigh Valley/Industry Mutual Aid group took action following a fatal explosion at a chemical plant in Allentown that left five workers dead and several other people injured. One of the fatalities occurred in an adjacent business in the industrial park near the Lehigh Valley International Airport. The explosion leveled the plant, seriously damaged nearly a dozen buildings in the industrial park and caused at least \$4 to \$5 million in damage. The accident spurred the group to initiate a mentoring program aimed at strengthening the safety performance of new "start-up" businesses.

Through the mentoring program small businesses will receive helpful compliance information about environmental, health and safety regulations. Another goal is to ensure local businesses are providing a safe work environment.

Partnerships

The Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania boasts several highly industrialized cities including Allentown and Bethlehem. The area is rapidly growing as many new businesses and high-tech industries are re-locating from the New York City metropolitan area to the valley. One of the challenges facing emergency responders and planners is to ensure that new businesses are following safe practices, particularly during the start-up phase of production. The Lehigh Valley/Industry Mutual Aid group is comprised of representatives from the LEPC and local industry.

Targeting Businesses

The group has identified 278 companies in the valley that manufacture, use, or handle chemicals. The list was compiled from a search of a telephone database and EPA's EnviroFacts database. The group's objective is to approach companies with the positive aspects of making safety and health a priority and improving their overall safety programs.

What Companies Need To Know

The group has determined what services or outreach materials should be provided. In addition to providing general compliance information, the group wants to provide small businesses with:

- Worker exposure concentrations;
- Basic industrial hygiene practices;
- Respiratory protection requirements;
- Fire protection requirements;
- Spill control requirements; and
- Compatibility of chemicals on site.

Challenges

Local Emergency Planning Committees carry out the emergency planning and community right-to-know aspects of the Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act and are a source of information about chemical risks in the community. Therefore, mentoring project participants are ever watchful that the project does not usurp the authority of the LEPC. Finding enough funding without using monies already earmarked for emergency response is an additional challenge. Additionally, some small businesses may not want to participate in the program because they fear: loss of proprietary business information; compliance costs; and inspections and penalties from a government enforcement agency.

Next Steps

The group will:

- Survey identified businesses to determine if they have conducted a hazards analysis;
- Contact State agencies and others such as universities to identify small companies;
- Work with community colleges to offer courses on chemical safety and regulatory compliance; and
- Gain buy-in from other area companies.

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